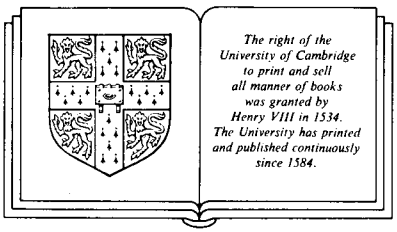
THE SECOND BALDWIN GOVERNMENT AND THE UNITED STATES, 1924–1929

Attitudes and diplomacy

B. J. C. McKERCHER
Department of History, University of Alberta



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1984

First published 1984

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 84–3168

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

McKercher, B.J.C.
The second Baldwin government and the United States 1924–1929.—(International studies)
1. Great Britain—Foreign relations—United States 2. United States—Foreign relations—Great Britain 3. Great Britain—Foreign relations—1910–1936 4. United States—Foreign relations—1923–1929
I. Title II. Series
327.41073 E183.8.G7

ISBN 0 521 25802 2

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Hitherto, so it seems to me, we have been inclined to deal with the United States from a wrong angle. We have treated them too much as blood relations, not sufficiently as a foreign country . . .

Foreign Office Memorandum, November 1927

The essence of diplomatic history is not so much to discover what was actually happening in a period under study but, rather, to understand the way in which diplomatists beheld that reality. The key to understanding why the makers of foreign policy chose particular courses of action, that is, to see how they perceived the world and how in turn these perceptions led to policy, lies in an appreciation of their attitudes. A case in point concerns those who made British foreign policy during the period of Stanley Baldwin's second government and their attitudes towards the United States.[1] During the life of that ministry, in the two years following the failure of the Coolidge naval conference in the summer of 1927, Anglo-American relations fell to their lowest point in this century.[2] The discord that arose was political in nature and, as far as the Cabinet and the Foreign Office were concerned, derived from American foreign policies which threatened Britain's ability to defend itself and the Empire. Since the resolution of these differences was believed by the leaderships of both countries to be decisive for their futures as great Powers, an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and mistrust developed in which attempts at compromise became difficult.

Baldwin's second government actually took office at a time of unusual quiet in Anglo-American relations. For most of the preceding five years, since the Senate had failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles in late 1919, these relations had been strained by a range of economic, diplomatic, and strategic issues, the legacy of the war and the Paris Peace Conference. Successive American administrations in the 1920s, with the Republican Party controlling the White House and Congress throughout, sought to remain isolated from international politics

outside of the western hemisphere. In practice, however, the United States could not isolate itself from Europe's financial difficulties, and this affected Anglo-American economic relations. There were two inter-twined issues: war debts owed the United States and German reparations. The British had borrowed heavily in the United States between 1914 and 1918 to finance their war effort and that of their allies.[3] The sum was immense, almost £1,000 million, though the British were owed far more by their former allies. In 1922 the poor state of Europe's economy led the British government to announce that it would cancel the debts owed it and collect only the amount needed to pay the Americans; if the Americans cancelled their debts as well, so much the better. It was felt that with this issue removed, despite the losses to Britain and the United States, the more pressing problem of European economic reconstruction could be tackled.[4]

But American policy and the German ability to pay reparations now touched the debt question. In 1922 Germany's economy was crumbling, in part because of the reparations régime imposed at Paris. A new, less stringent agreement tied to an American loan to Germany was needed, but this depended on the debt settlement: Britain owed the United States; France and the other allies owed Britain; and Germany owed France and the Allies. However, the Harding Administration saw no connexion between what the former allies owed Britain and the Anglo-American debt, nor between reparations and war debts, and it indicated it would collect what was owed the United States.[5] This created ill feelings on both sides of the Atlantic. The Americans felt a debt was a debt and had to be honoured. The United States government stood as the guarantor of the war loans which had been raised by selling bonds to the American public. It was impossible electorally for the American government to cancel the debts. This piqued the British. They believed they had fought the war to uphold broad democratic ideals, that America had benefited as a result, and that Britain had sacrificed far more in blood and treasure – in 1919 Britain was a net debtor, the United States a creditor, the opposite of 1914. However, the Americans remained intractable, and negotiations ensued that led in 1923 to the Anglo-American debt settlement.[6]

As the then chancellor of the exchequer, Baldwin took a prominent part in this diplomacy. The settlement brought Anglo-American economic relations back on an even keel; work began immediately on a new reparations agreement to be coupled with an American loan to

Germany, spurred on by the French occupation of the Ruhr as punishment for German default on their payments. In April 1924, just six months before Baldwin's second government took office, an international committee under the chairmanship of Charles Dawes, an American banker, arrived at a new reparations scheme to take the pressure off Germany. In this way, by November 1924, Europe's economic troubles were ameliorated and, for the duration of Baldwin's ministry, never upset Anglo-American relations. This is not to say that British and American financiers, industrialists, and traders failed to compete with one another in various parts of the world; they did, and with decided vigour. But this rivalry was dominated by discernible 'patterns of cooperation and compromise', at least until the end of 1928.[7] In tandem with the debt settlement, these patterns dominated Anglo-American economic intercourse, preventing the injection of pecuniary poison into purely political diplomatic relations.

An over-riding problem for the British in the period between the end of the war and the formation of Baldwin's second government was European security. In terms of Anglo-American relations this had both a diplomatic and a strategic dimension. At the Peace Conference President Wilson had undertaken to join with the British in guaranteeing France from a resurgent Germany; indeed, this allowed the French government to overcome some of the more extreme demands of the French Army. But the Senate's failure to ratify Versailles meant the collapse of the guarantee and all of the political commitments which Wilson made, including American membership in the League of Nations, the proposed guardian of international security. This American abdication of political responsibility in Europe created strategic problems for the British who decided they could not guarantee unilaterally French security.[8] Anglo-French relations suffered and the French, fearing restored German power, used their military and diplomatic preponderance between 1919 and 1924 to encircle and enfeeble Germany. This occurred through treaties negotiated with Germany's eastern neighbours, most of whom had benefited territorially at German expense at the Peace Conference, and the threat and use of military power to assure Germany honoured the obligations imposed at Versailles; the Ruhr occupation was the high point of this latter policy. To a large extent British leaders laid the blame for Europe's security problems on American isolation.[9] By mid-1924, however, the American element in

Europe's security problems had receded, at least for the British, as Baldwin's Labour predecessors were promoting 'the Geneva Protocol' as the panacea for European, as well as international security. As an ostensible League endeavour, it was going to ignore the United States in enforcing its particular vision of international peace.

The only unresolved problem in the period before November 1924 centred on the lack of a comprehensive Anglo-American agreement on the possession and use of naval power. This brought decided discord to Anglo-American relations.[10] It was not the technical aspects of naval competition, like disputes over gun calibres, that created difficulty; these were simply the visible manifestations of a deeper political problem: the incompatibility of the British doctrine of maritime belligerent rights with the American theory of the freedom of the seas. During the war, until April 1917 when the United States joined the Allies, neutral American commerce had been hurt by British maritime blockade of the Central Powers. This issue dominated Anglo-American relations from the armistice until 1921 – during the period of their belligerency, the Americans joined their British allies in enforcing firmly maritime blockade. In November 1918 the Americans sought British assurances that there would be freedom of the seas in future wars. These were not forthcoming as they struck directly at the heart of British policies of Imperial defence, the basis of which was a powerful navy with the ability to keep open maritime lines of communication whilst blockading the sea routes into the enemy's homeland.

This British determination not to relinquish their place as the world's greatest naval Power led to an equally strong American resolution to secure formal equality. This mutual antagonism remained at the fore until, at the Washington Conference in late 1921, Britain and the United States agreed to parity in capital ships. For the moment this took the urgency out of the naval issue. In reality, though, the Washington Conference did not do what it was supposed to do in terms of relieving Anglo-American tensions. American admirals still were suspicious of the Royal Navy – technical improvements in vessels and guns, the method of getting around the strictures imposed at Washington, as well as worry about protecting sea routes, were not eliminated.[11] The Washington Conference had not limited lesser warships, especially cruisers, the chief weapon for defending maritime routes and imposing blockade. Although

dormant when Baldwin's government took office, it was this which, when tied to corollary issues after 1926 like the League's pursuit of disarmament and American desires to have a new arbitration agreement – the former would limit naval arms and the latter their use in defending British interests – brought Anglo-American relations to their low point.

In this way broad economic and political issues, and the technical aspects of naval rivalry, did not produce Anglo-American disharmony after late 1924. The debt settlement removed the main financial block to good relations, and trade rivalry was dominated by those 'patterns of cooperation and compromise'. Though lamentable, isolationist policies effectively removed the United States from efforts touching European security. It was the political side of the naval question – belligerent rights versus the freedom of the seas – that was problematical. Belligerent rights had to be upheld if Britain was to preserve its maritime supremacy. Hence the American question gradually assumed greater importance for the second Baldwin government; resolving the predicaments it spawned became a matter of maintaining Britain as a Power of the first rank.

Austen Chamberlain, the Cabinet, and the United States

Because of its special nature, foreign policy has rarely been the province of the full Cabinet; instead it has tended to be the preserve of two men, the prime minister and the foreign secretary. Whilst some prime ministers have from time to time doubled as their own foreign secretaries, for the century between the Congress of Vienna and the July Crisis the careers of Canning, Castlereagh, Palmerston, Salisbury, and Grey underscored a continuity in British foreign policy.[12] David Lloyd George's rise to the premiership in December 1916 disrupted that continuity. He rose to power on the assumption that he could inject vitality into flagging British war effort, and at the centre of his attempt to do so was the creation of the War Cabinet. But when this new body was established the foreign secretary was not considered important enough politically to merit a place in it, the result being Lloyd George's assumption of control over foreign policy and diplomacy. Once the war ended and the War Cabinet was phased out, the prime minister and a few of his private secretaries had dislodged the foreign secretary and the Foreign Office from the formal processes which made foreign policy.[13] This situation remained

essentially unchanged until the advent of the second Baldwin government.

At that time two unique factors reaffirmed the traditional pre-eminence of the foreign secretary in foreign policy matters. First, Baldwin was indifferent personally to international politics, which resulted in a willingness to allow the foreign secretary, Austen Chamberlain, to lead in these matters. In effect the prime minister became merely another Cabinet member who considered British external relations as they appeared on the Cabinet agenda. Baldwin's personal disposition to allow Chamberlain this independence was reinforced by a dislike of Lloyd George and of the manner in which the power of the foreign secretary had been subverted during Lloyd George's premiership. Baldwin did not want to imitate Lloyd George nor repeat his mistakes.[14]

The second factor was political, and it concerned the unity of the Conservative Party. Baldwin offered Chamberlain the post of foreign secretary, still considered the most prestigious Cabinet position next to the premiership, in an attempt to heal a rift within the Conservative Party that had sapped its political strength and effectiveness for two years. Chamberlain had been the party leader in October 1922 when a group of his younger colleagues and junior ministers, including Baldwin, rebelled against the party policy of sustaining Lloyd George's coalition government in the House of Commons. When the rebels triumphed, Chamberlain resigned the leadership and led a faction of Conservative MPs loyal to him into the political wilderness.[15] Baldwin's short-lived first government had suffered as a result of this division and, by offering Chamberlain the Foreign Office after the Conservative electoral victory of October 1924, he hoped to avoid a repetition of his earlier difficulties.[16] It followed that Chamberlain could have a preponderant influence on foreign policy if he chose to exercise it. He did.

Chamberlain remained the most important member of the foreign-policy-making élite that existed during Baldwin's second government, so that his character – his private disposition and public image along with his aims and abilities as a leader – set the tone of British foreign policy in the latter half of the 1920s. A problem common to most studies that discuss Chamberlain's direction of British foreign policy is a tendency to concentrate heavily and somewhat simplistically on his public image. Too much is accorded to his formality and correct bearing, so that important aspects of his

personal and political development prior to November 1924 are ignored.[17] His most severe critic is conspicuous in failing to consider these antecedents.[18]

Chamberlain was a more complex individual than is generally assumed. Throughout his political career he consciously maintained a dual personality: to his family he was a warm and devoted son, brother, husband, and father; to the rest of the world, including even his closest political colleagues, he embodied Victorian propriety – always correct and formal, loyal, and adept at keeping his innermost thoughts private. Chamberlain was not unaware that his public manner affected his relations with those outside his family. He believed that he and his brother, Neville, were similar in many ways and, in once evaluating Neville's personal and political shortcomings – 'N's manner freezes people . . . Everybody respects him and he makes no friends' – he observed that 'it is precisely my weakness in the House today'.[19]

His personal and political relationship with his father, Joseph, was the dominant feature of his life. Joseph Chamberlain was politically influential for nearly thirty years, achieving his greatest prominence in the decade and one-half following the Liberal Party split of 1886. Early on the elder Chamberlain selected Austen to be his political heir, a role the son willingly assumed, and the boy's education in England, France, and Germany was the preparation for a life to be devoted to public service. He served his apprenticeship in the House of Commons – he entered in 1892 – as his father's assistant. His father's position naturally opened political doors and, showing promise, young Chamberlain achieved junior ministerial rank within three years. As his public career advanced, his close association with his father continued. He lived in the family home until he was forty when, in accepting the exchequer, he followed precedent and took up residence at the Treasury Chambers in Downing Street. Even after Joseph's active political life ended suddenly in 1906, the result of a stroke, Austen regularly discussed politics with him and, until his death in 1914, the elder Chamberlain remained his son's political mentor.[20]

Because Chamberlain tended to be less flamboyant in his politics and more faithful to his party than was his father, some of his critics assert that he was not at all like Joseph.[21] The implication seems to be that whilst 'Radical Joe' would do anything to achieve his political goals, Austen, by being more conservative and less flashy, was not as dynamic and innovative a leader. This is not correct. Of course, the

policies pursued by both men during their combined span of sixty years in Parliament obviously differed. Particular political concerns, the demands of the electors, and the nature of the political environment did not transcend time unaltered. New situations required new policies. But whilst specific political goals were mutable, the philosophy underlying them was not. Three constant aims guided both Chamberlains, and the son conformed to the pattern established by the father. These aims were to improve the lot of the common man, to maintain the Empire and Imperial unity, and to work to ensure international peace as the best assurance of continued British prosperity.[22]

When Chamberlain accepted Baldwin's offer of the Foreign Office, he already possessed a distinguished parliamentary and ministerial career spanning thirty years. He obviously had an acute political acumen, not rising to the forefront of political life and retaining a prominent place there for so long without demonstrating an ability to lead. Interestingly, criticism of his political career centres more on his personal defeats than on any analysis of his record in office. Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper proprietor, was the chief amongst his detractors, a situation deriving from the antipathy that existed between Chamberlain and Bonar Law, Beaverbrook's patron.[23] Beaverbrook's petulance has been repeated mindlessly by his disciples since,[24] so that Chamberlain's capacity to lead has been misrepresented.

Austen Chamberlain was an astute politician whose skills were the combination of his innate faculties and the lessons he learned from his father. From his father he acquired what can loosely be called 'work habits', and these entailed the high Victorian virtues of 'clear thinking and hard work'.[25] When confronted with a new political problem, Joseph Chamberlain decided clearly on his goal – assessed in terms of his general aims – and then planned carefully the route by which he could move to secure it.[26] With a few exceptions, such as the failure to contain the rebellion of his party in 1922, Austen profitably applied his father's formula to his own unique situation. The elder Chamberlain also added much to his son's capacity to lead when he was able to refine one paramount skill within Austen: the use of pragmatism. If the utility of a particular set of tactics faded suddenly, as it could if the mood of public opinion altered, the desirability of securing its objective might not. Hence it was perfectly acceptable to devise a new strategy to secure that goal, a line of reasoning that added

the critical element of realism to Austen Chamberlain's politics.

These acquired skills were supplemented by natural ones. Chamberlain possessed neither the intuitive brilliance of Lloyd George nor the dialectical prowess of Birkenhead, faculties that contributed much to the capacity of these two men to lead. But he did have an uncanny knack of being able to see to the heart of a problem, to reduce, quickly, complicated questions into easily digestible portions.[27] More important, he was, and was recognised to be, an honest man, loyal and incapable of duplicity.[28] These traits coloured all of his private and public dealings to such an extent that no one, whether his friend or enemy, could have delusions about where he stood on issues. Dismissed casually by some as 'boyish traits',[29] the fact remains that Chamberlain supported genuinely his colleagues and whatever causes he took up. He was not prone to equivocate to the detriment of his party, Parliament, or any ministry of which he was a member.

His first foray into international politics as foreign secretary resulted in a striking victory that provided proof of his diplomatic genius and assured his ascendancy in foreign policy matters. This derived from the role he played in the delicate and complex negotiations leading to the conclusion of the Locarno accords, the series of treaties that guaranteed the Franco-Belgian–German border whilst simultaneously attempting to stabilise Germany's eastern frontiers with several arbitration agreements.[30] Soon after he came to the Foreign Office, Chamberlain became convinced that with the amelioration of Franco-German animosity lay the basis for future European peace and security. He believed that if another continental war broke out Britain would willy-nilly be drawn in. He argued persuasively that if Britain played the honest broker in reconciling divergent Franco-German views on security, British interests could be better protected in the event of a continental crisis.[31] Baldwin gave him unstinting support and, as a result, Chamberlain garnered Cabinet approval of his policies. It is true that the Cabinet debated the implications of a Franco-German security pact to be guaranteed by Britain, and that it succeeded occasionally in shaping British notes.[32] But the foreign secretary's formula for maintaining European security remained unsullied and the credit for bringing France and Germany together in a spirit of cooperation, however cautious it might have been, was accorded to him;[33] he was given the Garter and won the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize.

Because of his instrumental part in effecting a Franco-German *rapprochement* within a year of coming to the Foreign Office – a goal which had eluded his predecessors for seven years – his initial stature within the Cabinet was enhanced further. It resulted in his authority on foreign policy issues becoming almost unshakeable for the duration of Baldwin's second ministry. It also meant that with the emergence of a foreign secretary who was influential in both his party and the Cabinet, the power of the Foreign Office in devising and implementing policy increased accordingly. With Chamberlain as foreign secretary, the Lloyd George experiment in controlling foreign policy was abandoned. The traditional pattern of control was reestablished, but with one subtle difference: through unique circumstances the foreign secretary stood alone at the centre of the policy-making process.

The members of Baldwin's Cabinet who, with their civil service advisers, contributed to the making of foreign policy remained a small group. This derived not only from Chamberlain's dominance in diplomacy but also from the major domestic, economic, political, and social problems that beset Britain after 1924, and which took the majority of Cabinet time.[34] What was true of foreign policy in general was even more so with respect to British American policy.

Baldwin's personal indifference to international politics has been noted earlier. Between November 1924 and June 1929 he only made public utterances on foreign affairs when the prestige of the prime minister was required to give added weight to policy. Only twice did Baldwin contribute behind the scenes to the direction of foreign policy. The first was abortive. Soon after his second ministry took office he suggested to Miles Lampson, a Foreign Office official, that a tripartite Anglo-American–Japanese peace treaty for the Pacific might have merit. When the Foreign Office rejected the idea out of hand because it would reopen issues buried at the Washington Conference,[35] he withdrew from making suggestions about foreign policy until shortly before the 1929 general election. At that time he succeeded in delaying Cabinet discussion of Anglo-American relations, which was being pressed for by Chamberlain; he did this to postpone what was sure to be a heated debate until after the anticipated Conservative victory.[36] But throughout his second government Baldwin gave Chamberlain his unflinching support.[37]

The most vocal Cabinet member, not only regarding foreign affairs but all number of issues, was Winston Churchill, the chancellor of the

exchequer. The product of a trans-Atlantic marriage, his blood ties to the United States did not prevent him from becoming on occasion one of the most vociferous anti-Americans in Cabinet. To be fair, soon after becoming chancellor, Churchill wrote Chamberlain warning him that the Treasury would not be reticent about foreign policy if it in any way touched on economic matters.[38] But after inducing Chamberlain to make a statement that the possibility of an Anglo-Japanese war was remote, at least for ten years,[39] Churchill settled in to enforce Treasury parsimony in every aspect of government. Although his constant bickering with the Admiralty over naval construction remains the most visible example of his attempt at imposing fiscal restraint, his actions did not impinge much on Chamberlain's work. Indeed, the few times that the Treasury attempted to trespass on the purely political domain of the Foreign Office, Chamberlain had little trouble in fending it off. Treasury incursions into the American question were attempts simply to find some excuse to avoid the bi-annual payments of the British war debt to the United States.[40] However, by the last year of Baldwin's second government Churchill had become a gad-fly in any foreign or defence policy deliberations, especially when these entailed questions of expenditure and national honour. He was always ready to criticise but rarely offered constructive alternatives. During the period of Anglo-American naval deadlock he even came to advocate two paradoxical policies simultaneously: resistance to demands for increased naval construction and the need for continued British maritime supremacy. Churchill was nothing more than a political opportunist whose every move was designed to bring him closer to the premiership.

Since the cruiser question represented the most conspicuous aspect of Anglo-American enmity in the late 1920s, William Bridgeman, the first lord of the Admiralty, was important in making foreign policy. His struggles with Churchill over funding for naval construction took a large amount of his time, and Admiralty–Treasury disagreements led to strained relations between Bridgeman's staff officers and Churchill's officials. But the Admiralty suffered from a siege mentality at that time. Just as much as the Treasury, the Foreign Office became an object of Admiralty obloquy. Bridgeman and several of his advisers, notably Rear-Admiral Dudley Pound, the assistant chief of the Naval Staff, believed that the Foreign Office was soft on the United States and, moreover, that Chamberlain and his

subordinates were too willing to compromise in order to pacify American sensitivities.[41]

There is no doubt that Bridgeman dealt honestly with Cabinet colleagues, including Chamberlain, in presenting the Admiralty case. But he knew little of international politics and had had nothing to do with the United States until the summer of 1927 when he represented Britain at the Coolidge conference. He disliked immediately the Americans he met: 'I don't think people at home have the faintest notion of the difficulty we have with these cursed American Admirals. They understand nothing of our position and very little of their own.'[42] Although Chamberlain followed willingly Admiralty wisdom in matters relating to the technical aspects of arms limitation, and he submitted all questions relating to these questions to Bridgeman,[43] neither he nor his advisers would allow similar freedom on political issues judged to be the Foreign Office's responsibility. This stance did not stop Bridgeman and the Admiralty from trying to influence British American policy concerning belligerent rights; the defence of the Empire was their principal preoccupation and, as they tended to regard the Empire as a static entity, perceived threats like an American call for naval equality had to be resisted.

Leopold Amery, the secretary of state for both the colonies and dominions, became preoccupied with the American question after the 1926 Imperial Conference. He had risen to prominence in the period after the Boer War by working assiduously to strengthen Imperial ties and promote better Imperial understanding.[44] The 1926 conference, both the run-up to it and the implementation of its resolutions, became the focal point of his endeavours during Baldwin's second government as he sought to use his position to bind Britain and the Empire closer together. But after 1926, in an attempt to demonstrate autonomy in foreign policy, the Canadian government arranged to exchange permanent diplomatic missions with the United States government for the first time. Several influential British Imperialists responded with dismay, believing that the Americans were intent on prying Canada away from Britain and the Empire.[45] The matter became critical in 1928 and, coming at the same time as Anglo-American differences over arbitration, belligerent rights, and the question of naval disarmament, the problems of preserving Imperial unity forced themselves on the making of British American policy at a crucial juncture. To ensure that his American policies were neither deflected from their course nor diluted in any way,

Chamberlain – who was not on the friendliest terms with Amery as the latter had played a prominent part in the 1922 revolt against Chamberlain's leadership of the Conservative Party – had to work to assuage the fears and worries of the colonial and dominions secretary and his supporters.

James Edward Cecil, the fourth Marquess of Salisbury, sat in the Cabinet as lord privy seal and, though tied to Baldwin by political rather than personal bonds, he was one of the prime minister's closest associates. Since Salisbury's family had been involved at the highest levels of political life since the reign of Elizabeth I, the association of the Cecil name with Baldwin's Cabinet gave the government an aura of prestige.[46] But the fourth Marquess had also gained the respect of his political colleagues by earning a reputation for evenhandedness and adherence to principle. His value derived from the respect that that equanimity engendered in his associates, opponents, and the civil service. It became Salisbury's function to mediate between opposing ministers in order to resolve differences that could split the Cabinet and weaken the party. He had demonstrated his worth in 1923 when he presided over a CID sub-committee that sought to resolve a vituperative Admiralty–Air Ministry disagreement over control of the Fleet Air Arm.[47] He did this with patience and non-partisan judgement. During Baldwin's second government Salisbury was called on a number of times to add his weight to the consideration of crucial political problems. Two directly concerned foreign policy towards the United States. He became the chairman of two policy groups: the Cabinet committee on disarmament and the CID sub-committee on belligerent rights. Salisbury's dispassionate handling of these two committees, especially of the belligerent rights sub-committee which witnessed the Foreign Office and Admiralty divided completely over how best to respond to the United States, permitted a crucial foreign policy debate to progress without causing a rupture in either in the Cabinet or between the competing departments of state.

Salisbury's younger brother, Robert, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, held the chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster until August 1927. Unlike Salisbury, Cecil could not approach politics in a calm, detached manner. Moreover, he was preoccupied with British foreign and disarmament policies; ultimately this made him one of Chamberlain's and the Baldwin government's strongest critics. A lawyer by training, a devout high churchman by conviction, and a

stubborn man by temperament, he seemed to embody the most extreme tendencies of each. Cecil saw all questions only in terms of right or wrong, holding his views to be the only correct ones; hence, those who disagreed with him were either misguided or malevolent and he attacked each with equal ferocity. Passionately committed to the League of Nations – he had led that section of the British Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference which had helped draft the Covenant – he believed that with universal disarmament would come universal peace. These notions were not incompatible for Cecil, as they were for most others, since he saw the League as the instrument for effecting disarmament.[48]

In the 1920s Cecil's view of international politics was based on two beliefs: the need for positive British participation in the League, as well as the desirability of Anglo-American accord. When he joined Baldwin's Cabinet in November 1924, Cecil anticipated that he would be made responsible for League affairs since, until then, they had been the province of either the prime minister or some Cabinet minister with an interest and enough political clout to take charge of them. But Chamberlain decided that League policy devolved from foreign policy, and Cecil lost an intra-Cabinet struggle over the direction of League affairs.[49] This was a blow, and from that point Chamberlain's League policies became the object of Cecil's bitterness. Baldwin attempted to placate Cecil over his loss of control of League policy by giving him the direction of disarmament affairs. Cecil consequently became the minister responsible for disarmament, leading the British delegation to the various meetings of the Preparatory Commission and accompanying Bridgeman as a senior delegate to the Coolidge conference. When that conference failed because of Anglo-American differences over the cruiser question, Cecil blamed his Cabinet colleagues for the impasse, especially Churchill, and left the government. Although his dislike of Chamberlain increased with time, those who have criticised the foreign secretary since over his League and American policies have relied heavily on Cecil's jaundiced views.[50]

Ronald McNeill, created Baron Cushendun in 1927, succeeded Cecil as the minister responsible for disarmament. His early career had been in journalism – he had been the editor of the *St James Gazette* from 1900 to 1904 – but after becoming an MP in 1911 he devoted himself totally to politics. As an Irish MP, Cushendun was preoccupied with Irish home rule and, later, with Ulster and, until